

*Charles B. Seib Post 10/14/77*

## The Press/Spy Affair: Cozy and Still Murky

The press has emerged from still another exposure of its escapades in the spy business with nothing more than a few scratches. Unlike scandals involving public officials, those involving the press are self-limiting: There is a flurry of superficial attention followed by benign neglect.

The latest examination of coziness between the CIA and the press was, as usual, not in the "serious," hard-news press. It appeared in Rolling Stone, a magazine devoted mostly to rock music. The author was Carl Bernstein of Watergate fame, no longer a Washington Post reporter but a free-lancer. It was a long article (about 12,000 words), and it contained an attention-getting estimate of the number of journalists who have played ball and more with the CIA: 400. Many of the specifics had been reported before, but the article conveyed, as no previous one had, the depth of CIA involvement with the press and its sanction in the executive suites.

Probably the most serious injury was done The New York Times. Bernstein identified The Times as one of the CIA's most valuable news-business connections. He quoted an unnamed CIA source as saying that between 1950 and 1966 The Times provided cover for about 10 CIA people as part of a top-level agreement to cooperate with the agency. Among the journalists he singles out as having close CIA ties was C. L. Sulzberger, foreign-affairs columnist of The Times.

When Bernstein and Rolling Stone distributed copies of the article a few weeks before its publication, The Times carried a column-long news story and, a

day later, a longer story consisting largely of denials, including strong ones from The Times and Sulzberger.

With the second article, The Times published a letter to the CIA pleading for information on any past or current relationships with the newspaper or its employees.

Noting the allegations in the Bernstein article, The Times told the CIA that its refusal to disclose its dealings with the media "has placed The Times and its employees in an untenable position." It stated a much broader problem than its own when it said: "The American public is confused and some foreign

was marked by an entertaining bit of infighting between the author and his old employer The Washington Post.

After the text of the article was made available to the press, but several weeks before its publication, The Post carried a long article on CIA and the press in general and the Bernstein article in particular.

This article, by Richard Harwood, deputy managing editor of The Post, and Walter Pincus, a Post reporter, was mostly rehash. But it contained an allegation of a serious flaw in the Bernstein piece, tucked discreetly between parentheses. A Senate source was quoted as saying that at least half of the 400 CIA summaries of operations involving journalists received by Senate investigators concerned foreign, not American, journalists.

A telling blow if true, but Bernstein got in the last lick. When his article appeared in Rolling Stone it contained a paragraph that hadn't been in the earlier version. It said that a "relatively small number of the summaries described the activities of foreign journalists." And in a dig at The Post for relying on a Senate source rather than on CIA sources, Bernstein added: "Those officials most knowledgeable about the subject say that a figure of 400 American journalists is on the low side of the actual number who maintained covert relationships and undertook clandestine tasks."

Something more should be said about that 400 figure. First of all, just how deeply involved were these journalists? That's a little murky. Bernstein said at one point that the figure "refers only to

those who were 'tasked' in cover assignments or had understanding that they would work for the agency or were subject to some CIA contractual control." He said, include the journalists who occasionally traded favors or information with the CIA. It is a pretty tattered effort to make a case, a 1953 trip columnist made to the Philippines, CIA "assignment."

In any case, the estimate journalists worked for or over 25 years is less startling. remembers that early last year much pruning by the agency report found that the covert relationships with journalists and other American media organizations.

Bernstein's article was not useful. He clearly did his legwork. But its value history.

The give-and-take that between journalists and sources will continue with those who often can be extremely. But the systematic use of press for intelligence purposes will be a thing of the past.

One problem area does not ever. That is the CIA's own press. The agency should renounce this activity, which smacks of hypocrisy and an international irritant. It could ban it in the CIA, being drafted, but it is difficult to predict that it will.

### The News Business

governments are using this situation as a weapon against the press. . . . The work of correspondents has been hindered and, because we have been denied access to our only source of authoritative information, we are unable to present all the facts to the public."

The CIA was unmoved. It said that it would not provide the information and, furthermore, that by its refusal it was not admitting such information existed.

The Times's frustration is understandable, and yet one must wonder what would happen if it unleashed a team of its own top reporters on the story. Bernstein seems to have been able to find talkative CIA sources, despite the official stonewalling.

Publication of the Bernstein article